

Public Policy Committee
Montgomery County Commission on Aging

Notes of the meeting
March 10, 2011

Attendees: Bob Tiller, Odile Saddi, Leslie Marks, John Honig, Rudy Oswald, Chuck Kauffman, Jack Sprague (by phone)

1. Welcome

Bob Tiller welcomed new members of the commission to this meeting, and encouraged them to continue participating in this committee.

2. United Seniors of Maryland

Bob Tiller and Chuck Kauffman gave a brief report on the USM rally in Annapolis on March 9. In addition to the two of them, Jack Sprague attended, as did Sarah Gotbaum, a frequent participant in this committee. Bob and Chuck agreed that there were several problems and disappointments with the day's program, some of which were beyond USM's control and some of which could have been handled more effectively.

3. State legislation

(a) Bob reported that the Maryland Department of Aging actually received a slight increase in the governor's budget proposal for the coming year, which is surprising in the present climate. John Honig pointed out that more than half of the department's budget is federal money, so looming federal cuts could have a big impact. Rudy Oswald will draft a letter to members of Congress about our concerns related to cuts affecting seniors.

(b) Communities for a Lifetime, SB 822 and HB 1188 – Jack reported that Senator Middleton made major changes to his own bill, including removing state certification as a central feature, removing senior center funding, and removing any fiscal cost to the state. Although we did not get everything we wanted, the new version is much closer to what we had proposed to Senator Middleton. The committee is generally satisfied with the new version and will support it. Jack thinks it has a good chance of passage in both chambers.

(c) MOLST, SB 203 and HB 82 – Jack reported that it passed the House of Delegates unanimously, and is considered by some Senate staff as a "slam dunk" in that chamber. This is a bill that we have supported, and we will certainly count it as a victory if it becomes law.

(d) Senior center information, SB 230 and HB 329 – Jack said that there is no known opposition, but it is unclear whether it is moving forward. The committee supports this bill.

(e) Financial crimes: Seizure and Forfeiture, SB 411 and HB 1316 – Delegate Waldstreicher filed a bill to serve as a companion to Senator Raskin's Senate bill. There has been no movement lately. There was a Senate committee hearing last month, but due to various unforeseen circumstances, no one from this committee was able to testify. The committee supports this bill.

(f) Permanent absentee ballot list, SB 409 and HB 787 – Jack testified in favor of this bill at a recent hearing. The committee supports this bill.

(g) Fairness in Taxation for Retirees, HB 622 – John asked if we might support this bill, which increases the income tax deduction for seniors. After discussion the committee decided to take no position on the bill.

(h) Extended unemployment benefits, SB 882 and HB 1228 – Rudy asked if we might support this bill, which is actually enabling legislation for Maryland residents to receive extended federal unemployment benefits. We need to check the fiscal note to see if it would require additional state expenditures. Rudy will look into it, and, if there is no fiscal impact, we will ask the executive committee to support the bill.

(i) Nursing home staffing, SB 934 – This bill would have a huge impact on state Medicaid expenditures. The committee decided to take no position on this bill.

4. County issues and other concerns

(a) Accessibility, visitability and universal design – Bob suggested that Leslie Marks might consider submitting a summer study proposal in this area, and might explore what role the state could play in helping to make housing design more accessible and appropriate for seniors. Leslie and Chuck engaged in a spirited discussion about several aspects of this broad topic. They will consider developing a summer study proposal.

(b) Chuck mentioned his interest in trying to get the Vital Living Committee and the Commission on Aging to coordinate their advocacy efforts. He will speak to Elaine Binder about it.

(c) The county executive's budget will be made public on March 15. There is no way to get an advance peek at it. The HHS department will hold an open budget forum on March 17.

(d) The committee noted that Elaine Binder will take the lead in organizing face-to-face visits with County Council members, and commission staff will set up the specific dates for the visits.

5. Next committee meeting

The next Public Policy Committee meeting will be on April 14, 2011, at 9:30 a.m. We are trying to stick with the second Thursday of the month as our regular meeting date.